

his words.

"Is that, such a small thing, not a wonder to your minds," he began again. "Would you deny its right to breathe freely of the air? I would not," he said, pushing the point home.

"The mighty Totara that reaches to the blue haven of Ranginui? Would you dare to measure yourself against its might, its hardness? Would you dare to trample on it as a seedling, to display your courage."

He allowed a note of contempt to creep into his voice. Mocking. Taunting. "The mountains that stand taller than us all? Would you dare to plunder their sides? The sides of your own tipuna. Maunga teitei. Maunga tapu. Maunga tipuna," he said.

"I would not," he answered himself a moment later.

The faces looked away as he purposefully brought their focus into eye. Some held his gaze but all eventually bowed to its wither.

"I still don't think it's right," she said, again pragmatic, back to reality. Even the fit of the dress, for a moment almost tangible in her mind, had slipped away. "The old man wouldn't let the family do it," she continued, "what makes you think you can get away with it? There'll be trouble. Mark my words."

"But it's mine isn't it," Johnny shot back defensively. It sounded childish to his own ears, as if he was trying to convince himself, not her. "I mean, it's in my name. The old man did that himself. Do you think he would have done that if he hadn't known I'd do my best with it. He wasn't that silly you know," he said sarcastically, in an effort to justify himself.

"Maunga teitei, Maunga tapu, Maunga tipuna."

"Oh c'mon Johnny," Nancy said irritably. "You're twisting everything around. You know very well why it's in your name. You're the only one he thought he could trust. And anyway, you know you've got to get everyone else to agree before you can do anything, and that's just about impossible. No one's forgotten the old man's words, that time before he died."

"It'll be no sweat," Johnny bounced back, his mind already thinking ahead, darting through twists and turns, seeking the easiest way to his family's heart. "If I played it straight to the letter of the law I wouldn't have any problems and they know it. It IS in my name and that's all the law recognises. It was bequeathed to me by my own grandfather, but, well, I don't want any family trouble over it. I'll see to it that everyone's kept happy," he said with finality.

"I still think you're asking for trouble," Nancy said, a note of resignation, how-

ever, lurking in her voice.

"How long is it we have been here I ask you," the old man pressed, lifting his frail figure erect, the pride in his voice and stature, for a moment making him appear young and robust.

"You all know we fought for this land. That from all sides our enemies saw their own blood on the ground. And how much of ours was spilt for this ... THIS ... that you would so easily give up. YOU, Timi Karepo, your grandfather and mine, side by side they fought, taiaha and mere," he said pointing his tokotoko at an elderly man who squirmed uncomfortably, half-hidden beneath a blanket. "And YOU, Jimi Hemi, was it not your koroua who carried my grandfather battle-wounded from the Pa that day the pakehas attacked with musket and ball."

"How your memories are like a leaking gourd that you forget these things so easily."

His eyes bored into the faces, glinting like the polished head of a jade earring.

The silence spoke volumes.

THEY knew. HE knew they did.

"We talked about it last night," Johnny said between mouthfuls of food, "down at the pub. Most reckon it's a good idea. There were a couple who didn't see the point, but I'll work on them. They'll come around, you'll see."

"I bet most of them were haurangi too, probably don't even remember talking about it," Nancy threw back with a smirk. "Sometimes you're too smart for your own good, Johnny Wilson."

"Just remember your words when the money comes rolling in, my girl," he gloated.

"There's a long way to go before any of that comes through," she said, still feeling pensive, undecided. "Jeeze, the old man's gonna turn in his grave," she mumbled under her breath.

"What was that?" Johnny asked, with half an ear.

"Nothing," Nancy replied quickly. "Just saying how the bold can spurn the brave," she said covering herself, giggling moments later at her own wit.

But Johnny wasn't listening, so engrossed he was in his own thoughts. The smell of money more mouth-watering than the taste of the food before him.

"And what is it you will have when what lies at your feet is gone? Gold? Paper notes?" he said. "Sing-song?"

"What are such trivia when compared with what you now have? What more is there than that upon which you stand, your turangawaewae? With that beneath you, you are safe. When you die you know you will be in the arms of your tipuna. Safe. On your own turangawaewae."

Stony silence still greeted his spoken thoughts.

"Do not fool yourselves either, that because there is only one, one pakeha, in the beginning, that there won't be

more. There WILL be more. They number more than the sands on the shore. They will come in their droves to smell out the earth, to seek what it holds, to strangle it, her, Papa-tu-a-nuku. Yes. Remember that. Papa-tu-a-nuku. The giver of life...."

"She is not a thing to be used and abused for want and for whim. She is life. Not a money thing. Respect her and she will give up her secrets. Abuse her and she dies. And you with her."

"I saw the lawyers today," Johnny said matter of factly. "The deal goes through within the week. By next week we'll have a big, fat cheque in the bank and then it's heaven here we come." He was feeling triumphant, unstoppable.

"Yes Johnny," Nancy said coolly, lost for words. "I don't know, it still just doesn't feel right. Everytime I close my eyes I see the old man's face staring at me," she said quietly, afraid to go any further.

"Don't get the spooks on me now Nancy," Johnny said, throwing aside, deliberately, the serious note in her voice. "You want it just as much as I do. You're in it with me right to the end. Remember that."

"I know," Nancy said. "And I'll back you up. But still, it doesn't stop me feeling funny about it." Feeling uneasy she quickly changed the subject.

"What was he like anyway, Johnny? The old man. Remember much about him?" she asked.

"The old man? Don't really remember much. He was just an old man I suppose. You know, a lot of ideals, really stuck with the old way. He couldn't see past the old ways. He was a nice old fulla though. Always good to me. Never heard a hard word from him at all."

Nancy could feel the tears threatening to well over and spill down her face, an image of the old man standing before the whanau that day building up in her mind, refusing to go away.

"Maybe, maybe you should think twice about this Johnny," she blurted out before she knew it. "We're really not that bad off. We've got our own home and everything. We'll get by." The words ran out in a gush, a replacement for the tears.

"Rubbish," Johnny replied hotly. "You've got to take these opportunities. I wasn't sent to school for nothing you know. I was sent there for a purpose. To get the white man's knowledge. I've got it now, so why not make use of it."

Nancy turned away, unable to control the tears.

"And from whence did this idea come I ask you," the old man said, the bitterness like mustard on his tongue. "None other than my very own, I know. And you all so weak to be swayed by HIM. HIM, one lone pakeha, my own son-in-law. He comes here, offers you the world on a plate if you sell the land, and you